



## Does Being a Christian Have to Be Difficult?

**Luke 9:23:** (NASB) *And he was saying to them all, If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.*



Twenty-first century Christianity can be confusing. With all of the denominations, interpretations and approaches to Scripture, it is hard to fathom they all claim to represent the same thing. What is the bottom line? Is being a true Christian a difficult way of life, or is it a privileged way of life? Does it place demands on us that are unreasonable to the average person, or does it promise and deliver some kind of abundance the average person would notice? Does Christianity fundamentally change us, or does it help us be the best person we can be? Is Christianity an exclusive calling of those who

would do the hard work, or does it work by way of general knowledge and discovery? Let's see how Jesus describes what following him looks like and what it produces.

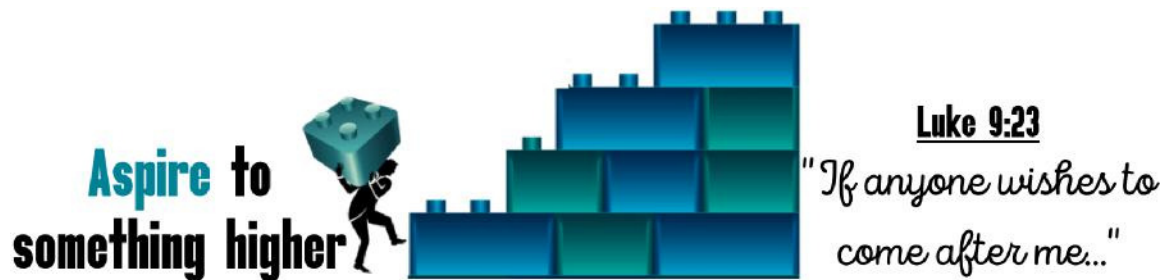
**The context of our theme text occurs sometime after the miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000 people:**

**Luke 9:23:** (NASB) *And he was saying to them all, If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

There are four building blocks to this description of discipleship by Jesus. We will take each element and use it as a basis to examine the difficulties of being a Christian.

**First Building Block: Aspire to something higher:**

**Luke 9:23:** (NASB) *And he was saying to them all, If anyone wishes to come after me...*



From a personal perspective, being a Christian begins with a desire to follow. This desire is much more than an attraction to Jesus; it is an aspiration to follow him:

**Luke 14:25-28:** (NASB) <sup>25</sup>Now large crowds were going along with him; and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>If anyone comes to me, and does not hate (love less) his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Jesus is saying to put God first and think of him in everything we do. Love your wife as yourself and provide for your family, for if you do not you are worse than an unbeliever.





<sup>27</sup>Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup>For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

Jesus specifically spoke to give pause to the crowds. He was testing their motives - were they desiring to be part of something impressive, miraculous and newsworthy, or were they (or we) aspiring to be part of something profoundly difficult and life-changing?

Before becoming a disciple, we must *first sit down and calculate the cost*. Are we prepared to give of our time, our possessions and our wills to do God's will? Do we have the determination to fulfill what is required?

We are contrasting *Christianity* from a personal perspective with *discipleship* from a divine perspective. Christianity in our day is not what Christianity was to the original disciples. However, discipleship means to be a learner, and being a learner of Jesus never changes.

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Disciple:  
one who engages  
in learning.  
— ” —

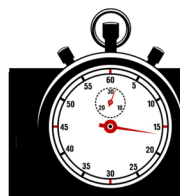
**From a divine perspective, discipleship actually begins with a decision by God to call us:**

John 6:44: (NASB) *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.*

We recently received an email asking:  
**Is it a sin to force someone to convert to Christianity?**

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Yes, it is a sin. We have no right to try to override the free will of another. A TRUE conversion CANNOT be forced. We are instructed to preach the gospel, but the calling comes directly from God. He alone decides who receives the precious gift of the holy spirit, which is His power and influence working in our lives. Discipleship is a call, not a threat. Some may look at this and say, if you do not bring them into Christianity, they will go to a burning hell. The concept of a burning hell is NOT in the Bible. Join us soon for a two-part series on this topic.



**Episodes 1174 and 1175  
Did God Make Heaven and  
Hell Humanity's Destiny?**

**COMING SOON**

This specific call goes to many individuals. All do not answer or even hear it.



**This has been the case from among the Jews in the time of Jesus, as well as down through the entire age of the gospel message:**

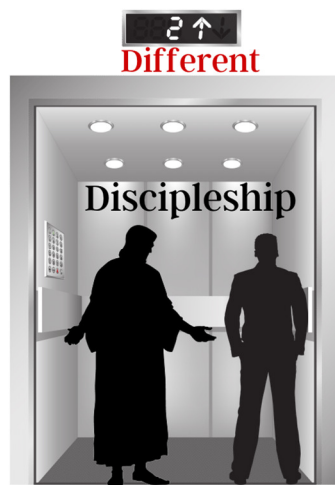
Luke 13:23-24: (NASB) <sup>23</sup>And someone said to him, Lord, are there just a few who are being saved? And he said to them, <sup>24</sup>Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Jesus was not shy about warning potential disciples about the challenges they would face.

**Does this end the argument? No. Let's look at another teaching of Jesus:**

Matthew 11:28-30: (NASB) <sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What great encouragement. Jesus promises rest and though he implies work, it is done alongside of Jesus himself.



### *The Difficulty of Discipleship:*

Discipleship should not be described only as "difficult."  
Rather, we should elevate it to be seen as "different."

- Though Jesus lays out hard and even scary steps, he also assures us of rest from the toil of our lives as he toils alongside of us.

Already we can see that being called to be a disciple of Christ is to be called to live a very different life.

**Describing discipleship as merely different is incomplete.  
How else can we describe it for a complete picture?**

There is far more to discipleship than just being different, but it *starts* with being different. Jesus was different than the religious leaders of his time because he was solely focused on doing God's will. This complete dedication to something higher than his own humanity required continuously decisive actions on his part.

**Second Building Block: Abandon the old ways:**

Luke 9:23: (NASB) And he was saying to them all, If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself...



**Luke 9:23**

"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself..."



From a personal perspective, being a Christian is thoroughly fueled by focusing on and doing the will of God. This is much more serious than simply *adjusting* our lives, which is often the thought of present-day Christianity. Discipleship requires us to *abandon* our previous priorities, no matter how noble they may have been. Be decisive!

Many have said that we should fit Christianity into our lives, but what Jesus is saying is it has to be the other way around by denying ourselves.

I have a simple example: Years ago, I had to stop associating with old friends that had different values than my new life of following Jesus.



Many people are familiar with a kind of “drive-thru” Christianity, where you go to church for an hour on Sunday, it makes you feel good and then you move on with your life. Christian Questions has been broadcasting every week for over 23 years without ever replaying one program.

There is often at least 18 hours of combined study each week to provide such a podcast, and that does not include time spent going to a half day of church on Sunday, weeknight Bible studies and personal study. We had another listener ask:

How much is too much? Once you know the basic message of God’s love, why do we need to hear it over and over if we are already a “good” person?

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Some may be content with the idea of being a good person and being inspired by the word of God. That is fine, but remember that is not discipleship. Discipleship is to be a learner and follower. A disciple would literally follow the master around, and the master would teach them how, when and what to do. Jesus would teach, heal, pray and travel, and then he would do it all over again. Is that too much for us? We first need to take care of our life responsibilities and do them as unto serving Christ because that is what a disciple does. How much is too much? We can only answer that for ourselves.



Twenty-three years of all of that work is the hardest thing I have ever done, but it is the most blessed thing I have ever done. Would I do it again? Oh, yeah! Just sign me up right here, right now because the learning that comes through the struggle is priceless. I will tell you that if you want to be a true disciple, learn through the struggles, and then you will see that you grow into somebody you never thought possible because it is God's spirit working in you.

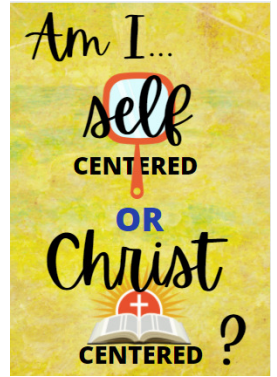
**The next verses verify this:**

**Luke 9:24-25:** (NASB) <sup>24</sup>For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it. <sup>25</sup>For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?





Jonathan provided a good example of needing to disassociate from certain friends because it was leading him on a different path. We are set apart from the world and the things that will separate us from God. Only we can decide for ourselves what those things are going to be, but instead of being self-centered, a disciple is going to be Christ-centered.



**Jesus himself had to abandon his own will as a man whenever the will of God stood above it:**

Psalms 40:7-8: (NASB) <sup>7</sup>*Then I said, Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. <sup>8</sup>I delight to do your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.*

*Your Law is within my heart - it was the driving force of Jesus' life.*

Matthew 26:39: (NASB) <sup>39</sup>*And he went a little beyond them, and fell on his face and prayed, saying, my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as You will.*

This is a symbolic cup, not some physical chalice he was carrying around. Some misunderstand that *the cup* Jesus wanted removed was having to die for the sins of the world because it was too much to bear. We know that cannot be true because he knew his death was necessary to be the ransom for all humankind and he was clearly a willing sacrifice.

Revelation 13:8: (KJV) *...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

There are several ways of looking at what the cup represents. *Let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as You will.* The cup represents Jesus letting go of something of his own in exchange for something of the Father. He wanted to put aside the issue on his mind (beyond the scope of this episode) because he knew the Father's will was more important. Just before his night of terror and torture he says, *Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done.* Jesus had to abandon his own will.

Remember the rich young ruler? He was enthusiastically faithful to the Law.

**Jesus saw this and knew his heart was good, but his earthly attachments were too significant:**

Mark 10:21-23: (NASB) <sup>21</sup>*Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. <sup>22</sup>But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. <sup>23</sup>And Jesus, looking around, said to his disciples, How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!*



How does that work? All three of us live in nice houses and drive cars. Why would Jesus tell the man to **SELL ALL**? We profess to be disciples and we are not selling all.

It is about stewardship: When we dedicate our life to God, we give Him all we have. In return, He gives it back to us to use in His service. We are not our own, and our "stuff" is not ours either.



Jesus was telling the rich young ruler that he cannot be attached to the things of the world. Notice Jesus does not say it is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom; he says it is difficult. Our hearts must be willing to let go of earthly possessions. If our heart is so positioned, God often will give us stewardship of those possessions to use in His service.

On the flipside, an example of using our possessions inappropriately and *not* in God's service: As a disciple, we would not drive our car to romantically meet someone who is married. We would not use our computers for an ungodly purpose.

We need to sanctify (set apart for a holy purpose) all that we have and all that we do.

From a divine perspective, discipleship is a clear abandoning of our earthly ambitions, but they are replaced by the attention and generosity of the Father in relation to His fulfilling our needs in His way and according to His will.

Philippians 4:19: (NASB) *And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

What about self-denial and putting the activities in our lives in a godly priority?



In Episode 1167, we spent time talking about what to do with our free time. This is a great episode to download the CQ Rewind Show Notes because we included a Decision Tree that gives us a scriptural roadmap to guide us with life decisions regarding things like friends, leisure, research, curiosity and hobbies, and how to put it all in perspective.

Matthew 7:7-11: (NASB) <sup>7</sup>Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup>Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? <sup>11</sup>If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!



**Is this Scripture talking about wants versus needs?**

We must always put the words of Jesus in context. Jesus is not giving us a gift card with an undisclosed amount for us to get whatever we want because God wants to give us everything. God wants to give us what is good for us so that we can become a stronger disciple.

James 4:3: (NASB) *You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

If we ask in the right way, with the right thoughts, intentions and motivations, God will take care of us.



## Our abandoning of our will and accepting God's will in its place is a task of daily discipline, but it is NOT without reward:

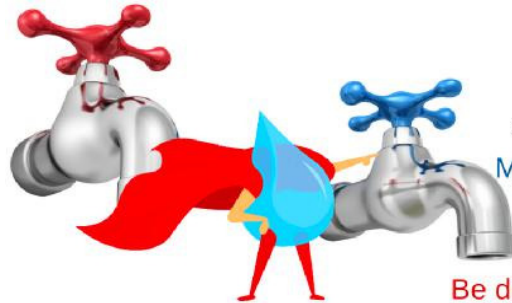
1 Corinthians 9:24-27: (NASB) <sup>24</sup>Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. <sup>25</sup>Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we, an imperishable.

We need to strive to achieve or attain the prize. It takes self-control and the denying of ourselves. Most Christians do not understand the prize, but we will reveal this in the last segment.

### Next comes Paul's personal and decisive application:

<sup>26</sup>Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; <sup>27</sup>but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

This is not an adjustment or a tweak in our lives; we need to undo our life and redo it God's way to be a faithful disciple. Exceptional athletes do not tweak their lives to become exceptional; they are wholly dedicated. We need to do the same.



### The Difficulty of Discipleship:

Discipleship calls upon us to abandon old, sinful and earthly ways of thinking and being.

Many are content to merely adjust these things, but our calling goes far beyond such a lukewarm approach.

Be decisive, rise up, let go and be counted for Christ!

While abandoning our old life seems harsh, it ends up being the only way to actually follow Jesus. Give up to go up!

Once we understand the concept of self-denial, what would Jesus have us put in its place?

As challenging as the previous two steps may have been, some of our most significant tests of will and focus come with the next step. The good news is twofold. First, Jesus and the faithful Christians of old would never expect anything from us beyond what they were willing to give. Second, all sacrifice, trials and difficulties come with help, encouragement and purpose.

### Third Building Block: Acquire a new mission:

Luke 9:23: (NASB) And he was saying to them all, If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily...



Acquire a new mission



### Luke 9:23

"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily..."



From a personal perspective, Christianity can look utterly distressing. To take up a cross in the days of Jesus was to walk towards suffering, pain, humiliation and a tortured death. While this is not at all enticing, it is the pathway our mission of discipleship must follow. *This takes devotion.*

### Why? This is what Jesus did:

Hebrews 12:2-3: (NASB) <sup>2</sup>*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, (here comes his acquired mission as a man) who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* <sup>3</sup>*For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Paul shows both Jesus' long-term approach and a moment-by-moment approach in taking up his cross. However, each day was not drudgery; Jesus had a balanced life. His life was not always about suffering. Think about the joy he got from healing, teaching, even playing with the little children that clustered around him. He enjoyed dining with many friends and followers, walking and talking with close friends and those that came to hear him speak. There was a joy to his life from just being a human being amongst other human beings. He got joy from doing the will of his Father, eventually being brought back to heaven with God. His life was all sacrifice, but there was a balance of goodness and happiness in all of this as well.

### He did, however, need to suffer:

Hebrews 5:8: (KJV) *Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered <3958>.*

**Suffered:** Strong's #3958 *pascho*; to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful)

While he suffered pain, he was not always hurting. Suffering usually means something painful, but not all painful things are bad. We often have sore muscles the day after we exercise. Part of taking up our cross daily is *growing* through the realization that pain and difficulty is often for our good. Jesus knew this. He was not "suffering" every day of his life. He was sacrificing his own will every day, and in many cases, it was a joyful experience.

### We must also suffer - be offered up:

Philippians 1:29: (NASB) *For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer <3958> for his sake,*

But *everyone* is suffering! Christian Questions receives emails of heartbreaking stories of those who are physically or mentally sick. Maybe they have lost their jobs or are being abused. We all suffer!



- 1) How does my suffering differ from my Muslim neighbor who is going through the exact same experience I am? Maybe we both lost our jobs.

Our suffering is for the purpose of helping us grow spiritually. Our suffering, then, has a very specific spiritual purpose. It is because we are Christ's disciples. He learned through the things he suffered. We should learn through the things we suffer as well. The Lord permits trials and testings specifically for our growth.





## 2) How are we suffering for Christ's sake? (Philippians 1:29)

By suffering as Christ suffered, we can put our sufferings into the context of using them for the glorification of God through Christ. We have purpose to our suffering which makes it easier to bear.

## 3) Why would a loving God want us to suffer at all?

God is certainly not up in heaven thinking of how He can make us suffer more. Suffering and sin are always the result of Satan's influence in this world. Our suffering is so that we can develop the self-discipline needed to become more Christlike.



We have a purpose in our suffering. We reflect on the lessons God has for us. In turn, we want to pass on the lessons we learn to help others. Otherwise, those experiences allowed by God are wasted.

This is an important understanding. It is not about us getting through our experiences as much as it is us getting through them by God's grace and learning enough to encourage others. It is about being vulnerable enough to share. Our suffering is more than just for us individually; it is for us collectively. Do we use it this way?



From a divine perspective, discipleship and its necessary suffering are important life experiences we need to be developed. God is saying He needs us to be *different than we were*. This is grooming us to be trusted with a glory that is beyond human comprehension.

### **This glory is only acquired after taking up our cross daily:**

**Romans 8:14-18:** (NASB) <sup>14</sup>For all who are being led by the spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup>For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father! <sup>16</sup>The spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,



The spirit of God is a key factor in the life of a true Christian. It helps us to understand that we are sons of God. As a son, we are loved! He will customize our experiences so we can grow up and become a mature adult in Christ.

### **Verses 17 and 18 tell us the result:**

<sup>17</sup>and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. <sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.



## Called to be joint heirs with Christ - to suffer for a short time:

**2 Corinthians 4:16-17:** (NASB) <sup>16</sup>Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

This is talking about transformation, but it is not instantaneous. Discipleship requires maturity and experience and is developed over time. An average life span of 80 years compared to an eternity with our Father makes the difficulties so worth it.

What does our third building block mean? How do we take up our cross daily? We need to walk through our trials and difficulties like Jesus walked, with the purpose of becoming more Christlike, of becoming more mature in Christ, of serving others, of being part of the body of Christ so that we can be a blessing and receive a blessing from above.

The mission is a transformed life. The mission is to be different. Come as you are, but do not stay as you are. The mission is transforming your life by the renewing of your mind and doing the perfect will of God.



### The Difficulty of Discipleship:

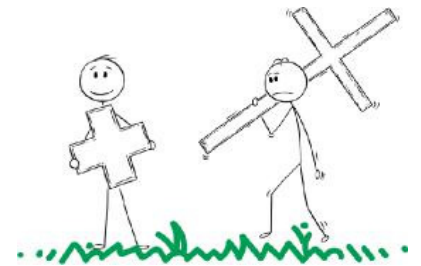
Discipleship requires that we acquire our own cross, for this is the pathway to glory.

Rather than seeing this as difficult, let us look through the eyes of devotion and see it as a privilege we are called to have.

We have to change our mindset to see this as requiring our devotion rather than as a difficulty. It requires devotion like the kind an athlete gives to his or her sport. Jesus lived his life with devotion to the Father's will with all his heart. The same is required of us. It is nothing to be afraid of but is something to strive towards.

We also do not want to look at someone else's cross. Comparing ourselves with others when it comes to trials or achievements is not profitable. Our experiences are tailored *to us*, and they are meant to develop *in us* the spirit of Christ.

Focus on Jesus and keep him in your sights.



**Taking up our cross daily is big. Is that not enough?  
What else could be required of a faithful disciple?**

To carry our cross daily is to carry the name of Jesus daily. Discipleship does not require anything else, and yet we shall see that Jesus says one more thing. It is to focus us on our being Christlike each and every day of our short earthly lives.



**Check out our CQ Kids video:**  
**HOW CAN WE BE MORE LIKE JESUS?**  
**PARTS I AND II**  
[christianquestions.com/youtube](http://christianquestions.com/youtube)



#### Fourth Building Block: Acquiesce to the new way:

**Luke 9:23:** (NASB) *And he was saying to them all, If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.*



From a personal perspective, Christianity is a way of life with a fixed direction. There is not a lot of guesswork. It is moving towards God through Christ. If everything we are doing is not moving towards God through Christ, we need to turn around. While we as imperfect humans may struggle with our hearts and minds, our course is clear. To acquiesce is to stay the course and follow Jesus. It is to be willing to get up when we fall, and continue - even if it is only with small steps. This translates into simple everyday discipline. Everything that happens to us is good because it is within His providence. He will be there to make sure we can do this. If we thank Him for all that happens to us, we will be God-honoring in our lives.



My sister, Merrily, is a very dedicated Christian. She mentioned something at one of our recent Bible studies that resonated with me and the rest of the group. She went for some medical tests and on her way home from the doctor - with no results yet - she looked up and said, "Thank you, Lord, for the results. Whatever they are it is good because it is in Your providence." This is acquiescing.

#### Jesus not only had this discipline, but he also showed us that his overcoming is for our blessing:

**John 16:32-33:** (NASB) <sup>32</sup>*Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. <sup>33</sup>These things I have spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*

At this point Jesus had not yet gone to the cross, but he was taking this evening to encourage his disciples. He told them to be of good cheer and they would find peace in him because he had *overcome the world*. His accomplishment is our blessing.

What does our acquiescence look like? How do we apply the discipline of discipleship?



#### First, it is a pathway of predictable challenge as well as promised exultation:

**1 Peter 4:12-13:** (NASB) <sup>12</sup>*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; <sup>13</sup>but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of his glory you may rejoice with exultation.*

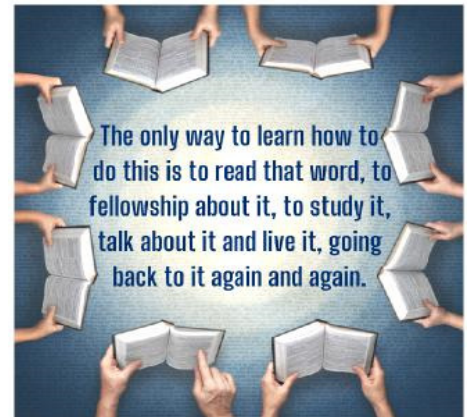


*Do not be surprised at the difficulties. This is to be expected. Keep on rejoicing because despite the challenges, there is goodness along the way.*



**Second, it is a pathway of approval on which we need to constantly seek better understanding:**

2 Timothy 2:15-16: (NASB) <sup>15</sup>*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.* <sup>16</sup>*But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,*



These texts state there is a requirement of us as disciples. To get God's approval, we must focus ourselves, being *diligent to present ourselves as workmen who accurately handle the word of truth*. The word of God is endless in its lessons if we are willing to search for them.



**Third, it is a pathway of hardship, incredible protection and promised care:**

1 Corinthians 10:13: (NASB) *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

This verse shows us our that trials *are* just the same as everyone else's experiences. The difference is that as a disciple of Christ, God will take my experiences and use them to help me grow into a better disciple and share those insights to help others. This requires change, leaving things behind, denying ourselves (our "wants"), taking up our cross and following - *acquiescing*. If we do, God *will provide a way of escape* in that He will help us get through tragedy and trauma if we lean on Him.



**Fourth, it is a pathway that leads to BIG positive, powerful end results:**

2 Corinthians 5:18-19: (NASB) <sup>18</sup>*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,* <sup>19</sup>*namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

Here is the beginning of understanding the magnitude of being a Christian. It shows us one of the bigger purposes. This is called the *ministry of reconciliation*. Jesus paid the ransom price to cancel the sin of Adam. That means the resurrection day, as Jesus says in John 5:28-29, *is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth*. There is this resurrection period, and then there is a reconciliation period where man has to be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 tells us how this will happen - through faithful Christians. This is part of our job description. Imagine being chosen by God to be one of those who helps the world get back on their feet so they can once again honor God. What better job in all the world could there be than that? This is only part of what is promised to true Christians.

From a divine perspective, discipleship and its accompanying challenges represent a life path of refinement. This refining process prepares a disciple for glory, honor and immortality.







God's goal is for us to have a crystallized character. This refining and crystallizing remind us of refining gold. In the process, all the dross and impurities rise to the surface. These represent all our "yuckiness"! These impurities are scooped off the top, irradiated from our hearts, as it were. Why do we need to go through this process? Because God requires us to be *eternally loyal*.

Eternal loyalty is an absolute requirement to faithfulness. Satan, once known as Lucifer, star of the morning, high up in God's arrangement of angels, was NOT eternally loyal. Jesus, obviously, has always been loyal to God. We are being trained to be eternally loyal like Jesus. This requires work. This is the reason true Christianity cannot be the "drive-thru" type of worship. We are being prepared for loyalty under any circumstance, any condition, no matter what.



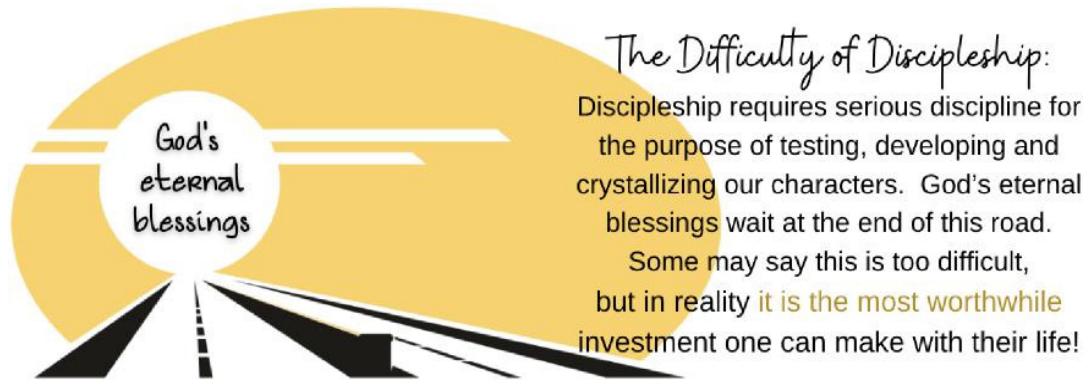
Matthew 5:10-12: (NASB) <sup>10</sup>*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* <sup>11</sup>*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.* <sup>12</sup>*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Blessed are we when things go badly for us because we are getting heat for our Christianity. The prophets before us had that same problem, and this is part of our calling. There is training, just like that athlete who goes through pain and difficulty something wonderful that comes from staying the course through all this. It is part of our training to succeed. It produces *eternal loyalty*.

**Jesus solidifies the unbreakable and eternal connection between him and his true disciples:**

John 14:1-3: (NASB) <sup>1</sup>*Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.* <sup>2</sup>*In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.* <sup>3</sup>*If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.*

What is this prize we discussed earlier in 1 Corinthians 9:24? It is the divine nature, being like Jesus! We are promised to inherit what Jesus himself inherits. We cannot get bigger than this! Christianity is difficult, but worth it.



It is important to note that every “Christian” is not going to get the divine nature. This is reserved for the true disciples of Christ - a very small number of people that will be given this *glory, honor and immortality*.

**Now that we have our four building blocks and are able to stand firmly, we read the final instructions of Jesus to his followers:**

Matthew 28:19-20: (NASB) <sup>19</sup>Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the son and the holy spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Our part of discipleship is to spread the gospel.





**The Apostle Paul gave us this instruction:**

2 Timothy 2:2: (NASB) *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, **entrust** <3908> these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.*

**Entrust:** Strong's #3908: *paratithemi*; to deposit (as a trust or for protection)

Just like when we put money in a bank, we are supposed to deposit what we have learned into the hearts of others. Once we have it, we are required to share it.

**There are four practical things we need in order to effectively communicate the gospel:**

-  Be biblically literate. Do you know that person who can always quote lines from movies? That is because he has seen it 18 times and talks about it nonstop. We need to be able to do that with the Bible.
-  Have strong faith in what we are teaching.
-  Study Jesus' life and teachings, as we are representing him.
-  Have a strong relationship with other disciples.





Discipleship is a lifelong endeavor. It is not something to take lightly; we need to take it seriously every day of our lives. It is not without trial, but it is also not without blessing. It is not without hardship, but it is also not without glory. It is not without indecision and worry, but it is also not without the assurance of God's will, God's providence and God's guidance through His holy word. If we believe that God has called us through Christ, what are we going to do with that calling? Get up and get going because that is what discipleship is all about, and there are only blessings (though often through difficulty) waiting for us.

*So, does being a Christian have to be difficult?  
For Jonathan and Rick (and Julie) and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*



Join us next week for our podcast on March 29, 2021  
Ep. 1171: How Did Jesus Prepare His Disciples For His Death?

### Bonus Material and Study questions

*Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they're supposed to help you discover who you are. – Bernice Johnson Reagon*

Some examples of the pitfalls of mediocre discipleship:

The subtle temptation of progressively-degraded morality: Watch how this text goes from reasonable to despicable. This depicts the continual issue of making offerings for our behavior instead of being accountable for it and changing it. This text reveals the tendency of humanity towards a dramatic outward show rather than taking humble corrective measures.

**This attitude is where we get our extreme society today:**

**Micah 6:6-8:** (NASB) <sup>6</sup>*With what shall I come to the LORD And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? (Reasonable yet useless)* <sup>7</sup>*Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams (unreasonable and still useless), In ten thousand rivers of oil? (Impossibly exaggerated and yet still useless) Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Heinously dark and evil, utterly insulting before God and obviously worse than useless)* <sup>8</sup>*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

All that God wants is obedience. Just, loving, humble obedience.  
True sacrifice is born there.



Sacrifice was never the complete answer - even for Jesus himself. Jesus DID sacrifice ALL, and yet he knew that such sacrifice without 100 percent obedience would not be acceptable.

### **Obedience is the best sacrifice:**

**Psalms 40:6-10:** (NASB) <sup>6</sup>*Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; my ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering You have not required. <sup>7</sup>Then I said, Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. <sup>8</sup>I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart. <sup>9</sup>I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation; behold, I will not restrain my lips, O LORD, You know. <sup>10</sup>I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your loving-kindness and Your truth from the great congregation.*

Out of the obedience of Jesus came his sacrifice, and out of his sacrifice came reconciliation.

### **Israel and the lure of social acceptance:**

Sacrifice becomes completely worthless to God when the direction of our lives does not reflect obedience to His ways. Our life path directly reflects the destiny of any “sacrifice” we offer up to God.

**For Israel (this prophecy is to the two-tribe southern kingdom of Judah) to be called Sodom is telling, as they had fallen into widespread lip-service sacrificing while their lives actually mocked God:**

**Isaiah 1:10-17:** (NASB) <sup>10</sup>*Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah. <sup>11</sup>What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me? says the LORD. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. <sup>12</sup>When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts?*

(Source: Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Whole Bible) ...the courts of my temple, which were two, that of the priests, and that where the people assembled, 2 Chronicles 4:9. So this reproof seems to be directed against both priests and people, as unworthy to enjoy this privilege.

<sup>13</sup>*Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. <sup>14</sup>I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup>So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. <sup>16</sup>Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup>learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.*

Sacrifice is designed as a tool of connection to God. We feed off of one another's example. What are we eating? Outward group gestures with no inward conscience are not acceptable to God!

More on the details of how to practically implement discipleship into our everyday life:

**We can only deliver what we have promised with consistency if we are properly outfitted to do so:**

**Ephesians 6:10-13:** (NASB) <sup>10</sup>*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of*





wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

**Paul encourages us to deliver a life that reflects the doctrines of truth daily, to live what we speak:**

**1 Corinthians 15:29-34:** (NASB) (Because Jesus is raised, and God will be over all.) <sup>29</sup>...If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? <sup>30</sup>Why are we also in danger every hour? <sup>31</sup>I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. <sup>32</sup>If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus (if I had been thrown to the lions), what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. <sup>33</sup>Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals. <sup>34</sup>Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

**Paul wrote this epistle while in prison in Rome and his death seemed imminent:**

**Philippians 1:20-21:** (NASB) <sup>20</sup>according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup>For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

**Once we have fully delivered our discipleship even unto death we will then be with Jesus:**

**Revelation 17:14:** (NASB) These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with him are the called and chosen and faithful.

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# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep. 1170: Does Being a Christian Have to be Difficult?

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1170-following-jesus/>

See:



1. Why was Jesus so discouraging when speaking to the crowds in Luke 14:25-28? Did he really mean anyone who follows him must hate their family? What must we do before we decide to become a disciple? (See Luke 14:25-28)
2. Discipleship begins with what action from God? Do many choose to follow this call? Why not? How does Jesus soften the difficulty of discipleship? (See Matthew 22:14, 11:28-30, Luke 13:23-24)
3. Explain the difference between being a *good Christian person* who is inspired by the word of God and being a *disciple* of the Master. (See Luke 9:24-25)
4. How do we know that Jesus had to abandon his own human will at times to follow the Father's will? Did Jesus want *the cup* of having to die for the sins of the world removed, or was the cup representing something else? How do we know? (See Psalms 40:7-8, Matthew 26:39, Revelation 13:8)
5. Was the rich young ruler a bad person? Why is it difficult for a wealthy man to enter the kingdom of God? Would it be difficult for you? (See Mark 10:21-23, Philippians 4:19)
6. If we let go of our earthly possessions, how will we get by in the world? If we abandon our will, our wants, how will we survive in life? What reassurances does God give us that our needs will be supplied? With what are our earthly ambitions replaced? How can we possibly do this? (See Matthew 7:7-11, James 4:3, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)
7. How can we look at Jesus' life to change our mindset on *suffering*? How is our suffering different from anyone else's? What should our focus be when we are going through trials - what is their purpose in our lives? (See Hebrews 5:8, Philippians 1:29)
8. What is the comfort Paul gives us? What is our mission? (See Romans 8:14-18, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17)
9. How do we apply the discipline of discipleship? How do we acquiesce? (See 1 Peter 4:12-13, 2 Timothy 2:15-16, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19)
10. What does our acquiescence to trials and difficulties in our lives accomplish? Why is this necessary? What is our beautiful mission now, and in the future? (See Matthew 5:10-12, John 14:1-3, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Timothy 2:2, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21)
11. What are the four "building blocks" of discipleship described in Luke 9:23? What does *aspire* mean to you? What old ways would you, or did you, abandon as a disciple of Jesus? Where can we find the inspiration to *acquire* this new mission? (See Hebrews 12:2-3) What does *acquiesce* mean to you?